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FUNDING

Environment, Forestry and Fisheries minister working to soften sting of budget cuts

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MINISTER of Environment, Forestry, and Fisheries Dion George has outlined measures put in place by his department to minimise the impact of budget cuts in the 2024-25 financial year.

George said budget cuts over the 2024 medium term expenditure framework period amounted to R2.5 billion.

The budget cuts had "placed pressure on the business operations of the department", he said.

George also said funding has been

reprioritised from existing resources by implementing cost containment measures on non-core items such as catering, venues, travel and subsistence to deal with facilities management.

"Rising cost of maintenance and fuel have been funded from reprioritisation from within the department budget.

"The rate of rising costs will eventually not be affordable and will require revision to the number of voyages undertaken by the department as well as ownership model relating to the vessels," George said about the operating costs of the department's vessels.

The minister also said the cost of ICT was managed through the prioritisation of funding to mandatory services required for the department and to reduce the cost of non-mandatory services.

"Contract negotiations with State Information Technology Agency and other service providers is ongoing to revise services in line with budget allocation."

George said the department's environmental programme has had to revise job creation targets downwards in line with the available budget allocation.

"The resultant consequence is that the number of expanded public works programme workers will be reduced, and contracts entered into will have to be renegotiated with service providers."

Asked what steps his department would take to fund 230 vacant posts amid the budget cuts, George said the department was considering re-allocating funds from the operating budget to fund salaries and benefits of the employees.

"The overall budget on compensation of the employees allocated to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and

the Environment was 22.8% (R2.217 billion) of the departmental budget of R9.539 billion.

"The department spent a total of R2.118 billion or 100% of the budget allocation for compensation of employees for the 2023-24 financial year."

He said the department has implemented several measures to prioritise vacancies and monitors head count in line with the government strategy to manage employee budget as per the National Treasury circular and Department of Public Service and Administration directive.